



NY State Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation  
Hearing on Climate Change – May 17, 2018 – New York, NY  
Testimony by Adrien Salazar, Campaign Strategist, Dēmos

Assemblymember Englebright and other honorable members, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today on what is one of the most critical issues of our time. My name is Adrien Salazar. I am an immigrant from the Philippines, raised in California, now living in Washington Heights here in Manhattan. I am a Campaign Strategist for Dēmos, a racial and economic justice policy organization based here in New York City. We advocate for economic justice, racial equity, and democratic empowerment, and in my work, I am committed to ensuring the policy solutions we enact to address the climate crisis also build a more just and equitable society. This is why we at Dēmos support the Climate and Community Protection Act, which we see as one of the boldest climate bills in the country.

The scale and severity of the climate crisis is clear and present for thousands of New Yorkers and millions of people around the world. From superstorms like Sandy to hurricanes in the Gulf South, from wildfires in California to the recent deluges devastating farms in Nebraska and villages in Mozambique, climate change is disrupting livelihoods, and is for many a matter of life or death. I was born in the central Philippines, a region that is a hotspot for typhoons. In 2008, my birth town was struck by Typhoon Fengshen, flooding the region and leaving people without electricity for days. In 2014, the world saw the deadliest storm on record, Typhoon Haiyan, level the city of Tacloban in the Philippines. I have a niece and nephew in California two and three years old, who during the increasingly intense fire seasons do not go outside because of the toxic air quality that pervades a hundred square-mile region around fire zones. In New York we witnessed Hurricane Sandy disrupt thousands of lives, cause dozens of deaths, and create nearly \$33 billion in damages for the state. The climate crisis is palpable for many of us, and as the recent U.N. report on preventing over 1.5 degrees Celsius global warming demonstrated, the window for acting is getting narrower and narrower.

New York is one of the top 10 carbon-emitting states in the country. We must do our part to reverse the climate crisis by passing the strongest climate proposal we can to drive down the state's carbon emissions while protecting the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The CCPA is that proposal—it would be the boldest climate law a state has passed in the country, not only because it sets the state on a path of aggressive emissions reduction, but because it also tackles the inequity faced by communities that bear the disproportionate burden of pollution and the impacts of climate change.

Climate change affects everyone, but its impacts are not felt equally. As a result of historic discrimination and disinvestment in communities of color and low-income communities, there are neighborhoods in the state that breathe more toxic air than others. Black and brown communities face a double-edged sword: We bear the brunt of not only the pollution of the fossil-fuel based economy, but also higher vulnerability to climate change impacts. New York must protect vulnerable populations from the extreme impacts of climate change, and ensure that no community is left behind in the transition to a renewable energy economy. We can increase resilience to climate impacts, reduce emissions, and reinvest in communities, tackling racial and economic justice simultaneously as we build a green economy. We can design policy to address climate risks and equity—and before the legislature today, we have a bill that does this in the Climate and Community Protection Act.

The CCPA is not just a climate bill. It is also a racial justice bill, a public health bill, and an economic development bill. In addition to calling for an economy-wide reduction of all greenhouse gas emissions in the state by 2050, it also directs 40 percent of state funds for achieving renewable energy targets to disadvantaged communities. It creates an equity screen that would assess equity impacts of rules, regulation, investment, and other aspects of policy implementation. The bill requires the state to identify barriers to accessing renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. It requires consideration of not just carbon emissions but also associated co-pollutants, which contribute to public health risks like asthma. And the bill requires strong employment and contracting standards, including apprenticeship opportunities, and prevailing wage standards for jobs created through achieving emissions reduction. For all these reasons, the bill is ambitious in centering equity for a just economic transition, creating good jobs for working families. and investing in communities most in need.

By supporting the communities most affected by fossil-fuel pollution and climate change impacts, we improve air quality, public health, and the economy for all New Yorkers. The final version of this bill must maintain these standards of equity, and in so doing can send a signal to the rest of the country that addressing climate change means also building an economy that leaves no community behind.

An economy-wide target of achieving zero emissions is not only feasible but necessary if we are to address climate change at the scale of the crisis. In order to prevent catastrophic climate impacts, we need to rapidly decarbonize the economy, and to achieve this equitably, we must reduce emissions at the source. The governor has suggested that setting a *carbon neutral* or *net-zero emissions* target is necessary to give the state and industry flexibility to meet targets. This is neither bold nor ambitious. Setting a goal for zero emissions 30 years from now can send a signal to industry to accelerate innovation required to bring all sectors to zero emissions. New York can set the standard for bringing emissions to zero that other states will follow.

Secondly, a carbon neutral emissions-reduction regime that enables carbon-negative technology and carbon offsets to meet reduction targets inherently creates risk for emissions to persist in communities burdened by pollution. Polluting infrastructure like power plants, cement producers, transportation, and other carbon-intensive sectors are disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color. We cannot allow industries to bypass targets by investing in carbon credits or offsets generated by carbon-negative technology and practices, because this does not result in emissions reduction at the source. Carbon offsets also do not reduce dangerous co-pollutants that cause respiratory and other diseases. A carbon-neutral emissions reduction target effectively would require the creation of a carbon credit or offset market, a system that we know fails to achieve emissions reductions at the source. A 2018 study of California's cap-and-trade program that hinges on carbon credits found that in the period of 2011-2015, facilities regulated under the program were located disproportionately in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, and that co-pollutant emissions from facilities in these regions correlated with greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> In California's carbon trading system, polluters can pay for their emissions through various market instruments such as allowances and offsets, instead of directly reducing emissions. The market flexibility this is alleged to provide for emissions reductions, the study shows, in fact resulted in emissions increases in communities already disproportionately exposed to air pollution.

The study found that these facilities resulted in higher local emissions during the study period, demonstrating that a system based on offsets may not result in local improvements with respect to

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<sup>1</sup> Cushing, Lara, Dan Blaustein-Rejto, Madeline Wander, Manuel Pastor, James Sadd, Allen Zhu, Rachel Morello-Frosch, "Carbon trading, co-pollutants, and environmental equity: Evidence from California's cap-and-trade program," July 10, 2018, PLOS Medicine, <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1002604>>.

harmful co-pollutant emissions, and can lead to an increase in inequitable health outcomes for already pollution-burdened communities. In plain terms, carbon offsets or credits can create pollution hotspots. They do not decrease local emissions, and as this study found, can allow the increase of local pollution.

The argument for carbon neutrality suggests the need for flexibility for industry, but this is a red herring. Carbon-negative technology, carbon credit systems, and carbon offsets carry the risk of violating the health of communities already burdened by pollution. The CCPA already has flexibility built into it—with a requirement of implementation evaluation every 4 years with recommendations for adjustments of targets and future actions. Setting a target for achieving zero emissions can jumpstart a national conversation of what is required to decarbonize the economy, and can accelerate research, development, and investment in the technology needed to achieve this goal.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize that directing 40 percent of investments to disadvantaged communities is a critical element to achieving equitable outcomes as the state reduces emissions. As previously mentioned, polluting facilities and infrastructure are sited disproportionately in low-income communities and communities of color. These communities also tend to be the same communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Renewable energy investment in the state can spark economic development, building local wealth, and resilience. Reducing pollution and carbon emissions in frontline communities can create growth and can redress historic discrimination and disinvestment as we build a renewable energy economy. California set its own target for investment of greenhouse gas reduction funds in disadvantaged communities at 25 percent. As the state monitored investments, it found that the state was exceeding its target, investing over 50 percent of funds in vulnerable communities because projects in these communities resulted in the most effective emissions reductions for the state.

The CCPA directs investment to generate tens of thousands of good jobs as the state expands energy efficiency, renewable energy, clean transportation, and infrastructure improvements. An analysis by my organization has found that the CCPA would generate an average of 150,000 jobs in the first decade alone. If you also count induced jobs—jobs created by the purchasing power of new clean energy workers—the total employment effect statewide is to create and support approximately 220,000 jobs initially.<sup>2</sup> Investment will create an estimated \$13.8 billion in income for New Yorkers, and \$138 billion over the decade. Simply put, the CCPA can drive an economic revolution in the state, and by targeting a significant portion of investment in disadvantaged communities, can help dramatically reduce income and economic inequality.

In conclusion, the CCPA is an ambitious bill in its climate and equity goals—one that can and is serving as a model for states across the country. In the last few months, several states have passed or are considering clean or renewable *energy sector* targets. If passed, the CCPA could set a new standard for tackling emissions reduction *economy-wide*, including industries that we may find challenging in the present moment. We can send a signal to other states across the country, and to industry, that we are ready to enact what is necessary to reverse the climate crisis—and that means every sector of society must be part of the solution. New York State must not shy away from a target of reducing emissions to zero, economy-wide. We must invest in communities and make sure we reduce the risks of pollution and climate change on those most burdened. We can rise to the challenge—and the opportunity—of the climate crisis to build a more just and equitable society while protecting our most vulnerable communities. The CCPA sets the path for New York State to lead the way.

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<sup>2</sup> Lew Daly, *The Climate and Community Protection Act: A Big Win for New York State Jobs and the Economy*, Demos, March 20, 2019. <<https://www.demos.org/policy-briefs/climate-and-community-protection-act>>.